

DRUG SIDE EFFECTS INCREASING AT ALARMING RATE

Reports of harmful side effects from pharmaceutical drugs are rising at an alarming rate. Serious consequences, such as a reaction that threatened a patient's life or caused a disability, were 2.6 times more frequent in 2005 than in 1998, while deaths increased by 2.7 times, from 5,519 in 1998 to 15,107 in 2005, say researchers who examined data collected by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). By some estimates, UK figures are even worse.

Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent getting a drug to market, the system for monitoring drug safety after approval is far from watertight. The FDA relies on reports from doctors and patients, but when several drugs are being taken at once it is often impossible to know which was to blame for any side effect. Also, since the system is voluntary, many reactions may be going unreported.

This means that even though 90,000 reports were sent to the FDA in 2005, it is hard to know the true scale of the problem, says Thomas Moore of the Institute for Safe Medication Practices in Pennsylvania, one of the authors of the study (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, vol 167, p 1752).

Yet even if the absolute number remains



unknown, the increase is troubling. The number of prescriptions went up between 1998 and 2005, but adverse reactions increased four times as fast. Drugs that were withdrawn for safety reasons caused a quarter of the early reactions, but contributed to less than one per cent of total reports in 2005.

Whatever the cause, the authors say, many different drugs seem to be involved, so monitoring needs to be beefed up. "This growing toll of serious injury shows that the existing system is not adequately protecting patients," Moore says.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 15 September 2007)

VACCINATED CHILDREN MORE LIKELY TO HAVE ADHD, AUTISM

A new survey indicates a strong correlation between rates of neurological disorders, such as ADHD and autism, and childhood vaccinations.

The survey, commissioned by Generation Rescue, compared more than 17,000 vaccinated and unvaccinated children in nine counties in Oregon and California. The survey found that, among more than 9,000 boys aged 4–17, vaccinated boys were two-and-a-half times (155%) more likely to have neurological disorders compared to their unvaccinated peers. Vaccinated boys were 224% more likely to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder (ADHD) and 61% more likely to have autism.

For older vaccinated boys (11–17), the results were even more pronounced. Vaccinated boys were 158% more likely to have a neurological disorder, 317% more likely to have ADHD and 112% more likely to have autism.

Generation Rescue also ran a full-page advertisement in *USA Today*. The ad compares the 36 paediatric vaccines that the CDC recommends today to the 10 recommended in 1983, and asks: "Are we over-vaccinating our kids?"

From 1983 to 2007, autism rates climbed from one in 10,000 children to one in 150 children, a growth rate of 6,000% (boys are significantly more affected by neurological disorders, accounting for approximately 80% of all cases). In the same period, the CDC's recommended vaccine schedule more than tripled.

The simmering debate over the cause of childhood neurological disorders shows no sign of cooling, but until now, no study had ever been done to look at unvaccinated children.

Generation Rescue was formed by parents of children who have been diagnosed with childhood neurological disorders (NDs), and is dedicated to examining the causes and biomedical treatments for autism, Asperger's, ADHD, ADD, PDD-NOS and other learning disabilities.

(Source: *Generation Rescue press release*, 25 September 2007, http://www.generationrescue.org/survey_pr.html)



INACCURACIES IN AL GORE'S "AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH"

The decision by the UK government to distribute Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* into schools has been the subject of a legal action by New Party member Stewart Dimmock. The Court found that the film was misleading in nine respects and that the Guidance Notes drafted by the Education Secretary's advisers served only to exacerbate the political propaganda in the film.

In order for the film to be shown, the UK government must first amend its Guidance Notes to Teachers to make clear that:

1) The film is a political work and promotes only one side of the argument;

2) If teachers present the film without making this plain, they may be in breach of section 406 of the Education Act 1996 and guilty of political indoctrination;

3) Nine inaccuracies have to be specifically drawn to the attention of schoolchildren.

The inaccuracies are that the film:

- claims that melting snows on Mount Kilimanjaro are evidence of global warming. The government's expert was forced to concede that this is not correct.

- suggests that evidence from ice cores proves that rising CO₂ caused temperature increases over 650,000 years. The Court found that the film was misleading: over that period, the rises in CO₂ lagged behind the temperature rises by 800 to 2,000 years.

- uses emotive images of hurricane Katrina and suggests that this has been caused by global warming. The government's expert had to accept that it was "not possible" to attribute one-off events to global warming.

- shows the drying up of Lake Chad and claims that this was caused by global warming. The government's expert had to accept that this was not the case.

- claims that a study showed that polar bears had drowned due to disappearing Arctic ice. It turned out that Mr Gore had misread the study: in fact, four polar bears drowned due to a particularly violent storm.

- threatens that global warming could stop the Gulf Stream, throwing

Europe into an ice age. The claimant's evidence was that this is a scientific impossibility.

- blames global warming for species losses including coral reef bleaching. The government could not find any evidence to support this claim.

- suggests that sea levels could rise by seven metres, causing the displacement of millions of people. In fact, the evidence is that sea levels are expected to rise by about 40 centimetres over the next 100 years and that there is no such threat of massive migration.

- claims that rising sea levels have caused the evacuation of certain Pacific Islanders to New Zealand. The government is unable to substantiate this, and the Court observed that this appears to be a false claim.

(Source: *The New Party News*, 3 October 2007, <http://www.newparty.co.uk>)

HOW EL NIÑO SLOWS THE EARTH'S SPIN

El Niño has an immense impact on the weather—so great, in fact, that the ocean warming phenomenon actually makes the planet spin more slowly. Until now, though, no one knew why. It was also a mystery as to why the effect did not kick in for several weeks after ocean temperatures reached their peak.

Now, Jean Dickey and her colleagues at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena say that the answer is blowing in the wind.

El Niño events warm Pacific Ocean surface waters in the tropics, resulting in strong westerly thermal winds. The total Earth system spins with a constant speed,

but these winds make the atmosphere spin slightly faster. Due to the conservation of angular momentum, the body of the Earth then slows to compensate, making the days a little longer. Because the atmosphere dissipates heat slowly, the temperature takes a month or two to reach its peak, explaining the delay in the Earth's deceleration (*Geophysical Research Letters*, DOI: 10.1029/2007 GL030846).

The effect is slight, says Dickey. "The overall changes of angular momentum between the Earth and atmosphere during El Niño cause a slowdown at the 1 millisecond [per day] level," she says.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 21 October 2007)

GREAT PACIFIC GARBAGE PATCH

The so-called Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a stewy body of plastic and marine debris that floats an estimated 1,000 miles west of San Francisco, is a shape-shifting mass far too large, delicate and remote ever to be cleaned up, according to a researcher who recently returned from the area.

Charles Moore, the marine researcher at the Algalita Marina Research Foundation in Long Beach who has been studying and publicising the patch for the past 10 years, said the debris—which he estimates weighs three million tons and covers an area twice the size of Texas—is made up mostly of fine plastic chips and is impossible to skim out of the ocean.

The trash collects in one area, known as the North Pacific Gyre, due to a clockwise trade wind that circulates along the Pacific Rim. It accumulates the same way that bubbles gather at the centre of a hot tub, Moore said.



While the bottle floats along, instead of biodegrading it will "photodegrade", he said. The Sun's UV rays will turn the bottle brittle, much like they would crack the vinyl on a car roof. They will break down the bottle into small pieces and, in some cases, into particles as fine as dust.

The Garbage Patch is not a solid island, as some people believe, Moore said. Instead, it resembles a soupy mass, interspersed with large pieces of junk such as derelict fishing nets and waterlogged tyres—"an alphabet soup", he called it. Also, it's undetectable by overhead satellite photos because it's 80 per cent plastic and therefore translucent, Moore added.

The plastic moves just beneath the surface, from one inch to depths of 300 feet [91.44 metres], according to samples he collected on the most recent trip, he said.

"The ocean is downhill from everywhere," Moore said. "It's like a toilet that never flushes. You can't take these particles out of the ocean. You can just stop putting them in."

(Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 30 October 2007)

SCALE OF PHARMA PAYMENTS TO MED SCHOOLS REVEALED

Stock options, free meals, lecture fees—the pharmaceutical industry showers them all on department heads at some US medical schools. Drug companies are big investors in medical research and post-qualification training for doctors.

Now, a survey by Eric Campbell of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and his colleagues has put figures on the industry's involvement.

Nearly two-thirds of department heads from 140 medical school and teaching hospitals said they had some relationship with industry. Over a quarter acted as paid consultants and one in 10 sat on a board of directors. Five of the 459 heads reported receiving gifts such as tickets to sporting events in the last year—something that industry guidelines generally prohibit (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 298, p. 1779).

Department heads said they were happy to accept grants of less than \$10,000 for educational purposes, but showed concern about larger payments.

Financial incentives could make them less vigilant about ensuring that educational materials and research plans were not biased towards specific treatments, Campbell warns.

(Source: New Scientist, 19 October 2007)

POISONED RUSSIAN EX-SPY WAS A PAID MI6 AGENT

Former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko was receiving a retainer of around £2,000 a month from the British security services at the time he was poisoned.

The disclosure by diplomatic and intelligence sources is the latest twist in the Litvinenko affair, which has plunged relations between London and Moscow to their lowest point since the Cold War.

On the day of the poisoning, 1 November, former KGB agent Mr Litvinenko met prime suspect Andrei Lugovoy at the Millennium Hotel in Grosvenor Square, London.

Mr Lugovoy claims that Mr Litvinenko

tried to recruit him to supply information to MI6. The businessman, another former KGB agent, also alleged that his ex-colleague asked him to find candidates for political asylum in the UK. He left Britain for Russia soon after, and has never returned.

Mr Litvinenko had defected to Britain in 2000 and was granted political asylum the following year.

It is understood that Sir John Scarlett, now the head of MI6 and once based in Moscow, was involved in recruiting him to the Secret Intelligence Service.

The fact that the 43-year-old Russian ex-spy was actually working for Britain when he died could provide the key to his extraordinary killing.

Mr Lugovoy has admitted to meeting Mr Litvinenko, a former lieutenant-colonel in the FSB (the re-styled KGB), several times in the months before his death. But he claimed he was being made a scapegoat for the death. He said that he believes MI6 was involved in the murder because agents had been unhappy at the way Mr Litvinenko had boasted of his links to the agency.

(Source: The Daily Mail, 26 October 2007)

PUTIN WARNS OF THOSE WHO WOULD RULE MANKIND

Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed that Russia is under threat from others who wish to split the country and take its vast natural resources.

Mr Putin told a group of military cadets and youth group members that while "an overwhelming majority of people in the world" are friendly towards Russia, there are some who "keep saying to this day that our nation should be split".

"Some believe that we are too lucky to possess so much natural wealth, which they say must be divided," Mr Putin said, speaking on National Unity Day.

"These people have lost their mind," he added with a smile.

Mr Putin in the same breath took a shot at the USA, saying there are people who "would like to build a unipolar world and rule over all of mankind". He said any attempt to establish a unipolar world was doomed to fail.

"Nothing of this kind has ever occurred in our planet's history, and I don't think it will ever happen," the president said.

National Unity Day was created by Mr Putin in 2005 to replace a holiday dedicated to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

(Source: The Scotsman, 5 November 2007)



OVER 5,000 US PATENTS ARE NOW STATE SECRETS

Figures released by the US Patent and Trademark Office show that secrecy orders were applied to 128 patents in the year to October 2007, taking the total to 5,002. Of the new orders, 53 were on private inventors, against 29 in 2006.

The US Invention Secrecy Act of 1951 allows US military and intelligence agencies to impose a gagging order on any patent—whether from a commercial R&D or a garage inventor—if its publication threatens national security. The secrecy orders require inventors not to reveal details of their inventions in any way—or risk two years in prison.

"I suspect that the oldest secret patents date back to the early days of nuclear weapons," says Steven Aftergood, who tracks government secrecy issues for the Federation of American Scientists. "There are certain technologies that have not ceased to be sensitive despite the passage of 50 or 60 years."

(Source: New Scientist, 18 October 2007)

LINK BETWEEN MICROWAVE OVENS AND OBESITY?

Microwave ovens may be to blame for kick-starting the obesity epidemic in the USA, the UK and Australia.

Professor Jane Wardle, professor of clinical psychology at University College, London, says that obesity rates started to rise soon after 1984—around the time of the rapid spread in microwave oven ownership. The mid-1980s also saw the first ready-made meals appearing in shops.

In 1980, 8% of women and 6% of men were classified as obese. By 2004, this percentage had increased to more than a quarter of all women and men.

Children are also suffering from increased levels of obesity, with 16% of those aged 2–15 classed as obese in 2003 compared with 10–12% in 1995.

Prof. Wardle said: "I looked at the figures showing rates of obesity in the population over many years and it seemed very clear it began between 1984 and 1987. So then we looked at what changes were going on in the food and activity world at that time, and one of the striking changes was there were differences in the speed with which we could prepare a meal as a consequence of the introduction of microwave [ovens]."

(Source: BBC News, 6 June 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/6725775.stm>)

VITAMIN & MINERAL DEFICIENCIES WIDESPREAD IN UK, EUROPE

Evidence increasingly suggests that vitamin and mineral deficiencies are widespread in the European Union. A recent report, for example, suggests that up to 3.6 million people in the UK now suffer from malnutrition. As a result, according to the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, malnutrition currently costs the UK's National Health Service more than £7.3 billion (Euro 10.8 billion/US\$14.8 billion) a year.

With the estimates suggesting that up to six per cent of the British population could be suffering from serious vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and UK hospital figures showing malnutrition to be found in all age groups including newborn babies, one has to question the wisdom of an upcoming proposal from the European Commission—the European Union's executive body—that threatens to ban thousands of vitamin and mineral supplements from being sold in Europe. After all, it's not as if the problem of nutritional deficiencies is only confined to the UK.

In 1997, for example, a report by the European Commission into nutrient intake in European Union Member States concluded that "for almost all vitamins, minerals and trace elements, there exist one or more population groups with intakes below nationally recommended levels". People thought to be particularly at risk included: women; adolescents or children; the elderly; women during the periconceptual period; people on a diet for losing weight; people on vegetarian diets; people having allergies to foods; persons eating a high proportion of "fast foods" or "junk foods"; and others.

The nutrients found to be most often deficient included iron, iodine and vitamins B2, B6 and D—and this, despite the fact that in many cases, with the exception of iodine, they were already being added to some foods as mandatory fortificants.

Given the widespread nature of nutrient deficiencies in Europe, naturopathic doctors, natural health experts and millions of consumers are currently up in arms over the fact that the European Commission is preparing to propose, before the end of this year, restrictions on the maximum permitted levels of vitamins and minerals in food supplements.

Ignoring independent studies showing that the nutrient content of our food has fallen substantially over the past few decades, as well as an abundance of knowledge and scientific data on vitamins and nutrition that has been available for 50, 60, 70 and even 80 years, it is widely expected that the levels the Commission is planning will be highly restrictive and far below those that are necessary to achieve and maintain optimum health. If these expectations are correct, therefore, the legal enforcement of such levels will result in the enactment of Europe-wide bans upon literally thousands of food supplement products, some of which have been sold and consumed safely for decades.

Not for the first time, however, the European Commission's plans are openly at odds with some of its previous assurances. In 2002, for example, during the run-up to the adoption by the European Parliament of the controversial Food Supplements Directive, the then European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, David Byrne, published a message on the Internet, on behalf of the Commission, in which he claimed that "[t]he aim is not to ban food supplements, as some have alleged".

Byrne's message was published in response to the large number of letters that the Commission had received from citizens who were concerned about the Directive and who were opposed to its adoption. Notably, therefore, Byrne specifically stated in this message that "[t]here is no doubt that most of the products marketed today are safe and of the expected quality". As such, if the maximum levels for vitamins and minerals that the Commission proposes turn out to be as low as some observers are claiming they will be, many consumers of food supplements will quite reasonably conclude that the Commission knowingly intends to ban products that it considers to be safe.

Perhaps mindful of the large numbers of European citizens who oppose the Food Supplements Directive, Byrne chose to end his message as follows: "I can assure you that your interests and those of consumers in general were at the top of our concerns when we proposed the Directive. I believe that you have every right to have a wide choice of safe and appropriately labelled food supplements available, to buy if you so wish. And I remain convinced that the Directive that will be shortly formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers will ensure that."

When the maximum levels are eventually announced, therefore, European citizens will finally discover whether Byrne and the Commission were telling the truth, or whether—as some have alleged—their real aim was to ban supplements and they were lying all along.

(Source: by Paul A. Taylor, Dr Rath Health Foundation, http://www4.dr-rath-foundation.org/THE_FOUNDATION/vitamin_and_mineral_deficiencies_are_widespread.html)